

A PRINCIPLE IN SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION

as taught by Willis E. Bishop
at Good Samaritan Village
(with limited editing)

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and He delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him in His hands." (Psalm 37:23,24)

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your abundant grace, a grace which supplies not only salvation but the joy of it, that walks with us day by day along the way, and assures us of victory in Him. As we turn to the Word of God, we pray that You will be our helper, that the Spirit of God may speak to our hearts, and guide each of our minds into the truth, for we ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

I would like to point out an important principle in Scripture interpretation. The Scripture encourages us to be careful with our interpretation, and so I make this statement, which is not really new: All Scripture is given for us -- II Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for teaching, for reproof, for instruction, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." All the Scripture is for us, but not all Scripture is written to us, that is, for our literal use in our lives today. Therefore, it takes some careful reading in any passage of Scripture that we may be sure we are interpreting it correctly. Is it written for our use or isn't it? Let me give you some evident illustrations.

In Genesis 11 and 12 we find that God appears to a man named Abraham who lives in Ur of the Chaldees below old Babylon. God comes to him and says, "Abraham, I want you to leave your country, go from your kindred and from your father's house to a land that I will show you." Abraham, in obedience, went out. Hebrews tells us he wasn't sure where he was going, God was leading him a step at a time. He led him to Haran, his father dies there, then He brings him down into the land. That command, "Get you out from your country and from your kindred and from your father's house," was given to Abraham and not to us. Elementary, my dear Watson? That is a passage of Scripture written for us but it is not intended for us to use literally today.

In I Chronicles 22, is a fellow named King David. He speaks to his son Solomon, "Then he called his son and charged him to build a house for the Lord God of Israel." There again is a command, but it is so simple in our reading that we would never stop to think, "Is that command given to us?" It is written for us, for our learning, but it is not intended that you and I should go out and build a house for the Lord God of Israel.

Again, in the New Testament -- Luke 10:3,4: "Go your way; carry neither money bag nor sandals nor greet anyone along the road." This is the Lord speaking to His disciples when He sent them out to preach "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." They were to go out unprepared in the sense that they were to go without a money bag or extra sandals,

and they were not to greet anyone along the way. They must tend to the business at hand. Again, I think that's rather self-evident, it is not something intended for us to do. In fact, the Lord changed that command after they returned. He said, "Did you lack anything?" They said, "Not a thing." The Lord said, "That's the way it's supposed to be. But now you will take a money bag and extra sandals, and get a sword if you don't have one." But those commands are not for us.

You say, "That's easy for us to understand," and it certainly is. But, you have the same sort of thing in John 13 through 17. Sometimes we have difficulty in discerning those chapters. Let me remind you, in John 13 Christ and His disciples are in the Upper Room eating a meal. He gets up and washes the disciples' feet. He gives the sop to Judas and Judas goes out to finish the betrayal of the Lord. Then He speaks to them, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14), and goes into chapter 15 concerning bearing fruit. In chapter 17 is His prayer, actually the Lord's prayer. Then they leave the Upper Room and go to the Garden of Gethesane. In studying these chapters, we must remember that particular setting and those to whom the Lord spoke, or else we will make some very serious mistakes.

Turn with me to John 14:26: "But the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatever I have said unto you." That verse is mistakenly used to teach that the Holy Spirit will teach Christians concerning the Word of God. If you believe that I'm not trying to argue you out of it. But I want to point out that I have problems with that verse. The Holy Spirit certainly has not taught me all things, and the Holy Spirit has not brought all things to my remembrance. The Lord is talking to a group of people whom He is going to send out as His disciples after His resurrection and ascension, and the Holy Spirit does that very thing for them. I don't remember all things, do you? Sometimes I can't remember what I have gone into another room for -- I turn around and go back out and start all over again hoping I'll remember. I have trouble even with verses of Scripture that I have memorized and have known for years. Somehow they have evaporated from my consciousness and I need to review them again. So I say to you that in John 14:26 Christ is saying something else. I have no doubt but that whatever we learn from the Scriptures it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us, but it is not on the basis of that verse.

Look at John 14:14: "If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it." That verse is frequently used to teach that if we ask anything in prayer the Lord is going to do it. But, does He? I haven't found that so. I have some prayer waiting before the Lord right now that He hasn't answered, and perhaps He will not do what I have asked. The fact is, I think I'd be scared sometimes if He did -- He knows better than to do everything that I ask.

About a year or two ago I was asked to help lead with someone else in connection with a movement which takes people who have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour and teach them some verses

of Scripture. It is an organized setup, printed in a little book, and there were a great many good things in that little book. But they use this verse to teach new-born Christians concerning prayer. And it's wrong. We have other verses that tell us how we are to pray: I John 5, "according to His will" -- then He hears us. In John 14 He is talking to His disciples, and in the early part of Acts we find that this was fulfilled in their lives. He was talking to them and not to us. Are we to pray? Oh, yes. I Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." The words used there are for coughing repeatedly. We are to pray in that fashion, again, and again, and again, and again. So we have verses that teach us to pray. We are to ask in His name -- Romans 8:26. When we pray we depend upon the Holy Spirit to interpret our prayer before the Lord as to what we really should have.

Sometimes we make a mistake in not separating truths, especially in the Old Testament, that relate to Israel from truths that relate to the Church. Israel and the Church are two different entities in the Word of God, and we need to keep them separate. In the early chapters of Leviticus are the burnt, meal, peace, sin and trespass offerings. None of us takes those up to the temple and offers them today. We don't even consider that because we know that has been set aside. That was for Israel to do. When Christ died on the cross He was the end of sacrificing acceptably to God.

Then we come to the question of the day of worship. There are those who claim to be Christians, and I am sure many of them are, who insist that you must worship on the Sabbath day. They forget that in Exodus 31:17 the Lord said, "The Sabbath is a sign between Me and the nation of Israel forever." Then the Lord stepped in at Pentecost and began the Church, and we find that the first day of the week becomes the day of worship for those who remember the resurrection of Christ.

There is the question of the tithe. God gave Abraham the tithe. He repeated it to Moses. Malachi repeats it as almost one of the last things in the Old Testament. There are those today, and I love them in the Lord, who insist on the paying of ten percent to the Lord. But God has a new order of the day. In the New Testament -- Acts and the epistles -- you will find that God says some different things. "Let everyone lay by him in store as God hath prospered him." You and I are to give, not as under the law. Incidentally, under the law it was not 10 percent but between 20 and 30 percent that was the tithe, and those who insist on the tithe I do not hear stressing that fact. You and I, if we are able, I'm sure would want to give at least a tenth, plus. It is not because we have to but because we want to. We should check on our giving -- it should come off the top before our expenses. There are folks who say that we should give after our expenses are paid, but maybe we wouldn't give anything. You may differ, but be Berean and check the Scriptures to see whether these things be so.